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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PU](#)

SUBJECT: BISSAU-GUINEAN ELECTION AT RISK DUE TO STRIKE

Classified By: Charge d'affairs a.i. Jay T. Smith for reason 1.5 b/d.

¶1. (U) On October 13, 2008, the labor union representing employees of the National Electoral Commission of Guinea-Bissau (CNE) announced that, effective October 14, 2008, election workers would strike until October 23, 2008. If by the end of that time, the government of Guinea-Bissau (GGB) fails to pay least 80 percent of the USD 842,000 in back wages and debts owed to workers, vendors, and contractors for previous elections stretching back to 1999, then CNE employees will resume their strike through November 23, 2008, thus seriously threatening the planned November 16, 2008 legislative elections.

¶2. (U) The current and anticipated costs of the November 16 legislative elections are covered fully by donors including the United Nations, the European Union, Portugal, Brazil, Angola and Mexico. However, since the 1999 nationwide poll, the GGB has accumulated debts to employees, contractors and vendors during each nationwide election. Following a recent contribution of USD 500,000 by the Economic Community of West African States(ECOWAS), the election arrears stands at USD 842,000. This money is owed to poll workers, vendors who provided supplies and contractors who performed a wide range of services. The striking CNE employees are demanding not just their back wages, but also the payments to vendors and contractors, since it was the employees who in good faith promised the vendors and contractors that they would receive payment in full for the delivered goods and services.

¶3. (U) In an October 17 meeting in Bissau, Aladje Mane, President of the CNE, warned PolOff of likely disruptions if the arrears are not paid. According to Mane, following the 2004 election, poll workers stormed the CNE headquarters and looted the offices because of failure to settle the outstanding debts. Mane placated the subsequent looters at the time by promising them that they would receive full payment by 2005 at the latest. The promised payments were never delivered, and Mane warned that in the run-up to the November 16 legislative elections, strikes, theft and violence were likely unless the arrears were settled. Mane also anticipated a scenerio where poll workers might hold the election results hostage in exchange for the money owed to them.

¶4. (U) Mane, union officials and GGB officials reportedly are working feverishly to find a compromise. However, on October 17, Mane told PolOff that the GGB simply does not have the money to settle the arrears. The strike by the election workers comes on the heels of a three-day nationwide strike by all civil servants, from October 14-17, 2008, in protest over the GGB's failure to pay government salaries for two of the previous three months. Government officials repeatedly said that the striking workers were justified, but that the government coffers were empty.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: The strike by the election workers seriously

jeopardizes the upcoming elections at a critical juncture for Guinea Bissau. In order to fight narco-trafficking and establish a functioning, stable government, it is imperative that legislative elections be held on November 16. By all accounts, the government does not have the USD 842,000 to settle the election arrears. It would be a tragic turn of events if the lack of such a relatively modest amount of money plunged the country into the chaos that is so conducive to narco-trafficking operations. Modest investments by the USG at this historic crossroads would produce huge dividends in years to come. END COMMENT.
SMITH